



***Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
May 20-24, 2013***

Northern Alberta program to end violence against aboriginal women gets boost from gov't

[Beacon News](#)

May 21, 2013



A Northern Alberta program that works to end violence against aboriginal women and girls is receiving \$200,000 in funding.

"The Harper Government is committed to ending violence against women and girls in communities across Canada," said Rona Ambrose, Minister for Status of Women.

"I am pleased that we are supporting this new project to ensure the safety and security of aboriginal girls in Northern

Alberta."

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities is receiving \$200,000 for the 24-month project that will work to end violence against First Nations girls aged 8 to 14 in the Wabasca-Desmarais community of Northern Alberta.

Alberta residents, tell us what you think of the Canadian oil sands by filling out this [brief survey](#).

A community steering committee with representatives from the Bigstone Cree Nation Women's Shelter, Bigstone Community School, Bigstone Cree Nation Family and Children Services and the RCMP will guide and oversee the project.

"We are working with community organizations across the country to end violence against women and girls and its destructive impact on our communities," said Laurie Hawn, Edmonton Centre MP.

"This project establishes a community steering committee and implements a strategy to address the particular factors and conditions that lead to violence against local First Nations women and girls."

"It is important to do all we can to ensure our community is welcoming, caring and safe for everyone," said Ron Taylor, Board Chair for the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities.

"We are pleased to partner with the Government of Canada on this project to engage community partners, bring about long-lasting behavioural change, and decrease violence against women and girls."

Through Status of Women Canada, the government's support for community-based projects that work to prevent violence against women has nearly doubled since 2006-2007, supporting over 600 projects.

Aboriginal woman settles lawsuit over 3½ years solitary confinement

[CBC News](#)

May 21, 2013 6:19 PM PT



BobbyLee Worm was held at the Fraser Valley Institution for Women, a multi-level federal prison in Abbotsford, B.C., designed to hold 86 women. (Correctional Service of Canada)

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association says it has resolved a lawsuit against the government of Canada filed on behalf of a 26-year-old aboriginal woman from

Saskatchewan who was held in solitary confinement in a federal prison for more than 3½ years.

More information on the resolution is expected to be released by the BCCLA on Wednesday morning, when the woman and her mother are expected to speak publicly about her ordeal and the effect the incident had on their family.

The BCCLA filed the lawsuit in March 2011, on behalf of BobbyLee Worm, who was 24 years old at the time, saying it was seeking to end the practice of holding women in solitary confinement for months and years at a time in federal prisons.

"Since the start of her incarceration in 2006, Ms. Worm, who suffered extreme physical, emotional and sexual abuse throughout her childhood and adolescence, has been subjected to extensive periods of solitary confinement, much of it while on a program called the management protocol," said a statement issued by the BCCLA in 2011.

Worm was held at the Fraser Valley Institution, east of Vancouver, where she was serving a six-year sentence for several offences including robbery.

The lawsuit alleged that while in solitary confinement, also known as segregation, Worm spent 23 hours a day confined to her cell, deprived of meaningful human contact, for months at a time.

BCCLA litigation director Grace Pastine said at the time that seven women have been on the management protocol since it was first created in 2005, and all the women on the protocol at that time were aboriginal.

"The devastating psychological and physiological effects of solitary confinement, particularly for women who have previously been abused, are well-documented. Human rights bodies have found the practice of prolonged solitary confinement to be either torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment."

The BCCLA said Worm suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of extreme sexual, physical and emotional abuse throughout her childhood and adolescence.

Reflect on Aboriginal peoples during Aboriginal Awareness Week, ITK says

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

May 22, 2013



"Canada proudly presents itself to the world as a country that embraces the cultures of its indigenous population," ITK's Terry Audla said in a statement about Aboriginal Awareness Week, May 21 to May 24. "I hope this week will strengthen the relationship between Aboriginal people and all other Canadians as we continue to build a country truly representative of each and every one of its people." (FILE PHOTO)

Aboriginal Awareness Week, May 21 to May 24, is an "excellent time to commemorate the contributions that Aboriginal people have made and continue to make to this

great nation,” said Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami’s president Terry Audla, in a May 21 statement.

“Canada proudly presents itself to the world as a country that embraces the cultures of its indigenous population,” Audla said.

“I hope this week will strengthen the relationship between Aboriginal people and all other Canadians as we continue to build a country truly representative of each and every one of its people.”

Aboriginal Awareness Week was first introduced in 1992 with the purpose of increasing awareness of Aboriginal peoples and cultures within Canada and the public service.

Since that time, the week has grown into a nation-wide celebration, with activities that highlight Aboriginal cultures in Canada, including Inuit, Métis and First Nations.

Peter MacKay, the national defence minister, said that “during this annual celebration of Aboriginal culture, we take time to salute all Aboriginal peoples who serve or have served in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

“First Nations, Inuit and Métis personnel have a proud history within the Canadian Armed Forces, serving amongst the first battles on what is now Canadian territory. Aboriginal peoples’ traditions and values contribute greatly to our nation’s historical and cultural diversity,” MacKay said May 21.

Ryerson allows aboriginal students to learn their own way: How Ryerson University developed a culturally sensitive social work program for aboriginal students.

[Toronto Star](#)

May 22, 2013

Carol Goar



Jay Lomax performs a traditional native dance.

“The scoop” isn’t part of mainstream Canadian history. But in First Nations, the term is so well-known it needs no explanation.

In the 1960s and 1970s child welfare authorities, convinced aboriginal parents

were incapable of steering their children in the right direction, apprehended nearly 10,000 children. They were placed in foster homes or put up for adoption.

Jay Lomax was scooped from his home in Dakota Tipi, a reserve near Portage la Prairie, Man. He was sent to a farm with 10 children — four of them foster kids — in Sidney, a rural community 60 kilometres away — and subsequently adopted by a childless white couple in Ontario. He grew up confused, lonely and lost.

He decided to become a cop. "I wasn't in control of my own life," he explained. "I wanted control."

But as he worked toward his police foundations diploma at Sheridan College, something happened. His motivation dwindled. He completed the course, but didn't care enough to pick up his certificate.

He made a second attempt, enrolling in aboriginal law and advocacy at Confederation College in Thunder Bay. But that felt wrong, too. He finished the course and got the diploma. It was sent by mail.

"There was always a voice in my ear whispering 'children's aid,'" Lomax said. At first, he shut it out; children's aid had cut off his roots and destroyed his identity. But as he immersed himself in aboriginal traditions and culture, the truncated roots started to grow back. At the age of 30, heeding the call of the spirits, he registered for a social work program delivered by Ryerson University and First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI).

This time, his courses were relevant and his heritage was valued. "I could be comfortable with myself and the other students around me."

On June 6, Lomax and 17 other indigenous students will receive their bachelor of social work degrees from Ryerson University. Lomax will go to his convocation proudly, accompanied by his wife and two young sons.

At a time when 95 per cent of aboriginal young people don't go to university — and many of those who start fall away — the program Ryerson and FNTI have developed is worth heeding. It offers the youth of First Nations — the fastest-growing segment of Canada's population — an opportunity to learn the skills they need without sacrificing their identity.

"I've heard students say 'I've got my BA, I've got my BMW,'" Lomax said. "Our courses aren't like that."

There are no lecture halls, no passive listening and no jockeying for dominance. "We are all teachers and learners," explained Suzanne Brant, academic vice-president of FNTI. "We all bring our knowledge to the sharing circle."

Since most of the participants have full-time jobs — Lomax has been a native child protection worker for 12 years — the course is delivered in intensive chunks in rented facilities on the campus of the University of Western Ontario in London. Students use their holidays or unpaid leave to attend, some coming from as far as James Bay. Each segment begins with a culture camp in a First Nations community, led by native elders. “We’re a social people and ceremony and clans are intrinsic to our life,” Brant said.

Three-quarters of the professors are indigenous, including Lynne Lavallee, associate director of the Ryerson School of Social Work.

It is her job to ensure the program meets the same standards of academic rigour as mainstream courses. “It’s greater,” she said. “But we provide the indigenous framework.” To maintain its accreditation the program must pass scrutiny by the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators every seven years, Lavallee added.

The objective is not to churn out hundreds of aboriginal social workers. Since the program began a decade ago, just 64 students have earned their degrees. Most have become leaders, healers and counsellors in their communities. A few go on to get master’s degrees. Lomax hopes to be one of them, but first he has to earn some money and make up for lost time with his wife and sons.

Ryerson and FNTI don’t claim to have all the answers. But after generations of condescending and misguided policies, they have built a cultural hybrid that works.

UN forum: Inuit and Saami vow to “fight the tendencies of linguisticide”: Inuit Circumpolar Council and Saami Council deliver statement during indigenous forum

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

May 23, 2013



Aqqaluk Lynge, Leanna Ellsworth, Rena Skifte and Hjalmar Dahl from the Inuit Circumpolar Council at the 12th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN headquarters in New York City. (PHOTO COURTESY OF ICC)

Inuit and Saami are feeling the joint pressure of development and cultural and linguistic appropriation.

That’s at the heart of a message delivered this week by Inuit Circumpolar Council chair Aqqaluk Lynge in New York

City on behalf of the Saami Council and the ICC at the 12th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The two organizations, which form the Arctic Caucus at the Forum, say they want to “promote linguistic diversity, fight the tendencies of linguistic and promote youth initiatives to keep our languages strong.”

“The Arctic cultures must be made an essential focal point when development decisions are taken concerning Arctic regions, in order to avoid undesirable assimilation or destruction,” Lyngé said at the Forum now underway at the United Nations headquarters.

In order for Inuit and Saami to continue to develop as distinct peoples, conditions for the continued growth and enrichment of their cultures must be assured, Lyngé said.

And, with cultural development and the protection of the Arctic environment “inseparably linked,” he said “we do not want to dance to the tunes of the resource extraction companies.”

“It is therefore of utmost importance that the principle of free, prior and informed consent is respected in those cases and appropriate democratic infrastructure is in place to protect our culture and identity,” Lyngé said.

As well, the collective rights of Inuit and Saami to their traditional knowledge must to be respected, with Inuit and Saami credited with the full benefits, including both cultural and financial benefits, such as royalties, he said.

Intellectual property and copyright regulations must also be respected in regard to Inuit and Saami knowledge, he said.

The ICC and the Saami Council will continue represent Inuit and Saami by promoting their rights to culture, both intellectual and international, in the World Intellectual Property Organization, he said.

The Saami in Scandinavia and Inuit in Greenland are part of the Nordic Council Language Convention, “with the right to use our own language in education and receive support to print books in Saami and Inuit languages,” Lyngé said.

“The same cannot unfortunately be said about Inuit in North America, where the Inuit language is rapidly disappearing. Only in the self governing territories, such as Nunavik and Nunavut in Canada, steps are taken to protect the language,” he said.

ICC now heading the “Arctic Indigenous Language project” under the Arctic Council which will look at ways to stop the disappearance of languages, he said. The project will also start an coordinated effort to establish communication across borders, such as the Saami in Scandinavia and Inuit in Greenland have done for many years.

Also at the Forum: Rita Petrussen, from Greenland's association for the deaf, used sign language when she gave a speech May 22, describing how deaf people who live in Greenland endure hard living conditions. These have become even worse, she said, following the closure of Greenland's only school for the deaf.

The Forum session continues until May 30.

Aboriginal cultural centre could be coming to Red Deer

[Beacon News](#)

May 23, 2013

Red Deer city council will consider rezoning land to develop an aboriginal cultural centre at its regular meeting on May 27.

Red Deer city council will consider rezoning land to develop the Asooahum Centre, an aboriginal cultural centre and housing development.

The aboriginal cultural centre initiative is part of a collaborative effort between the city and the Red Deer Native Friendship Society (RDNFS).

The land being considered for rezoning is directly east of the Lion's Campground at 4723 Riverside Drive.

The RDNFS culture centre and housing development envisions a co-located housing and culture site including outdoor space for programs and ceremonial uses, a community garden, office space and interpretive elements.

"This is the perfect spot for this development because it gives us a unique opportunity to expand an existing park node and incorporate an interpretive element for the benefit of the Red Deer Native Friendship Society, the aboriginal community and our community as a whole," said Lisa Perkins, director of corporate transformation for Red Deer.

[Employment for women – new opportunities on Canadian oil rigs.](#) Read it today!

Red Deer is currently notifying and addressing any questions or concerns from landowners and property owners within a 100 metre radius of the land.

"We don't know exactly what the facility will look like just yet, but we want to make sure we have conversations with those located near the site so that we can address any questions and concerns people might have before we rezone this land," said Perkins.

"Rezoning is the first step to enable the development of the Asooahum Centre with operational agreements and development permits also required before any development occurs."

If the land is rezoned, the RDNFS will start work on the design of the aboriginal cultural centre with the help of the entire community when they host a design charette in late June.

At that time, the RDNFS would also need to apply for the appropriate permitting needed prior to any construction.

"Construction of the Asooahum Centre is about celebrating community and aboriginal culture," said Tanya Schur, executive director for RDNFS.

"It is about building a cultural centre and housing for aboriginal people who are moving to Red Deer for the first time, or for people who already live here but want to connect with the aboriginal community in a new way."

City Council will discuss the rezoning at its regular meeting on Monday, May 27.

Youngsters pay tribute to residential school students

[Calgary Herald](#)

May 23, 2013 8:11 AM

Eva Ferguson



A Strathcona-Tweedsmuir School student releases a butterfly in tribute Wednesday to residential school students on the memorial grounds of St. Joseph Industrial School, a Catholic residential school south of Calgary. Photograph by: Stuart Gradon, Calgary Herald

Shivering, wide-eyed and slightly wet under the light rain of a chilly morning, a group of elementary students paid tribute Wednesday to those who faced the injustice of residential schools.

As part of the Human Outreach Project at Strathcona Tweedsmuir

School, the 32 Grade 4 to 6 students added to their study of aboriginal education by

visiting the site of the St. Joseph Industrial School, which operated from 1884 to 1924. It's also known as the old Dunbow School grounds just south of Calgary. Many spoke about the difficulty the nearly 1,000 students who were housed there must have experienced, including their loss of identity by having their native names changed to Christian names, and then being labelled with numbers so they could be more easily tracked by school administrators.

Dozens of native children were buried at the site's cemetery. Although it isn't clear whether any of students were abused, as they were in many residential schools across Canada, native children buried there did succumb to illness or malnutrition, or were killed in a fire that destroyed the original school house in the 1920s. Decades later, a massive 1996 flood that caused the banks of the Highwood River to collapse adjacent to the site caused several of the children's coffins to float into the river. They were later retrieved and buried again.

"This is a really solemn place, an emotional place. The kids that went to school here went through so much, and we want to pay tribute to them," said Grade 6 student Alice Yates.

"It helps us all to learn about native culture and history, so that when we see natives in the city now, we know what their people had to go through." Students spread ceremonial tobacco over the graves of some 75 children buried there.

They carried tiny boxes of butterflies to the site, releasing them in a tribute symbolizing the freed spirit of each native student, part of an effort to regain their dignity, and their human rights as children.

With small suede moccasins dangling around their necks, each student called out an aboriginal student's name as they coaxed out their winged creatures — but many just stuck to their hands, apprehensive about flying into the cold winds of the morning.

"I can't get mine off of me," giggled one little girl, watching the boy beside her with the same problem.

Eventually the butterflies were freed, whether they flew off or just hopped and hid in the tall grasses along the river.

"My aboriginal name? It was Jonny Blood," said Grade 6 student Ben Coleman proudly.

"We want to bring back the dignity of the kids that were here, because in many ways they are all just like us."

The school was built by the federal government, and operated by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate as a residential school for Blackfoot children. Father Lacombe was the first principal there from 1884-1885, while Father J.A. Demers was the last, serving until 1924.

Strathcona teacher Judy Goldsworthy said the visit was a culmination of all that students have been studying this year, particularly the complexities of aboriginal history and the struggles they faced as a culture.

"My hope is that our children will now be able to look at a person of aboriginal descent and truly see them — and feel that they understand a little more about their history and the challenges their people faced."

Wednesday's event also coincided with Canada's Aboriginal Awareness Week, May 21 to 25.

Christy Morgan of the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative praised the school's efforts to raise awareness around aboriginal issues, culture and history emphasizing how important it is that students learn the darker side of Canadian history and the treatment of natives.

"It's so excellent that these children took this kind of initiative — it's a step in the right direction.

"These kids will be our future leaders, and they will have a broader understanding of natives and native history."

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Minister Valcourt Congratulates Long Plain First Nation on Urban Reserve in Winnipeg

[Digital Journal](#)
May 23, 2013

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA--(Marketwired - May 23, 2013) - The Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, today congratulated Long Plain First Nation on the establishment of their urban reserve in the city of Winnipeg.

"Adding urban lands to reserve gives First Nations access to mainstream markets and greater opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and success," said Minister Valcourt. "All Canadians benefit from strong, healthy, self-reliant Aboriginal communities, and I congratulate Long Plain First Nation as they seize this

opportunity to build prosperity for both their First Nation and the entire city of Winnipeg."

The new reserve is located near Polo Park shopping complex in Winnipeg. Bounded by St. Matthews Avenue on the north, Madison Street on the west, Silver Avenue on the south and Kensington Street on the east, the developed land is 2.81 acres. Yellowquill College is currently located on the site and an 80,000 square foot office complex, as well as a gas station, are planned.

"It's been a significant amount of time that we've been working on this file, and we're overwhelmed with the fact that we've finally achieved our goal," said Chief David Meeches of Long Plain First Nation. "This will open the doors for many opportunities - for economic development, for jobs and for resources that will go a long way for the future generations of our community."

Long Plain First Nation purchased the land from Manitoba Hydro in 2006 and initiated the addition to reserve process. As part of the process, all of the required environmental assessments, permits and easements have now been completed, including a Municipal Development and Services Agreement which was signed with the City of Winnipeg in July 2010.

Adding this land to Long Plain First Nation's reserve base helps fulfill Canada's obligations under the First Nation's Treaty Land Entitlement agreement. These agreements are intended to fulfill a long-standing commitment arising from treaties signed by Canada and First Nations. Between 1871 and 1910, most First Nations in Manitoba signed the numbered treaties with Canada. Each treaty provided for the setting aside of reserve land by Canada for a First Nation based on population. In Manitoba, the majority of First Nations received their entire land allocations under the treaties; however, some did not. In 1994, Canada agreed to add to reserve 10,699 acres for the Long Plain First Nation. With today's addition, 1,910.78 acres have been added to reserve.

There are now more than 120 urban reserves across Canada, established under the Additions to Reserve policy and Treaty Land Entitlement agreements. The Government of Canada remains focused on four priorities, as outlined by the Prime Minister, that Canadians care most about: their families, the safety of our streets and communities, their pride in being a citizen of this country, and their personal financial security.

First Nations agreement to promote addressing violence: Howe Sound Women's Society advocated to end violence against elders, women and children

Whistler Question

May 23, 2013

Tanya Foubert



Several Sea to Sky First Nation representatives at the Sea to Sky Aboriginal Conference on Tuesday (May 21) perform a traditional drum song before the event's afternoon session at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre. Photo by Brian Noppé / Brian Noppé Photography

Two of six First Nations Chiefs were present on Tuesday (May 21) to sign a formal safety and security agreement that encourages band councils to take actions in their communities to address

the issue of violence against women, children and elders.

The work to see the agreement reach all six First Nations in the Sea to Sky has been ongoing and was spearheaded by the Howe Sound Women's Society Centre.

Executive director Sheila Allen said the focus of Tuesday's Aboriginal Conference held in Whistler was to share what the centre has discovered through its work over the past four years and begin to build bridges to see the work continued.

"Essentially, we would like to brainstorm with everyone that is present and come up with some ideas about what the next steps will be," Allen said. "We are hoping the First Nations might pull together and might put more resources toward this issue and we are hoping we can be of service in that regard."

In 2009, Annabelle Pierre applied for \$50,000 in funding from Vancouver Coastal Health to do a three year project, which was later extended into a fourth year.

With the funding, the First Nations Women's Safety Network was started and coordinated through the Howe Sound Women's Centre to work throughout the Sea to Sky corridor.

An outreach worker was recruited from within each First Nation communities of N'Quatqua, Lil'wat, Squamish, Skatin, Douglas and Samahquam. Those workers then established an advisory committee from within the community they work in to examine what needs are present for work to address women's safety.

Aboriginal women are 3.5 times more likely to be victimized than non-Aboriginal women and are eight times more likely to be killed as a result of violence against them.

Allen said now that the program is finished, two resource manuals have been created out of the information compiled by outreach workers and volunteers. The First Nations Elder Safety and Women's Safety resource guides specific to the Sea to Sky corridor are available on the Women's Centre website.

Pierre, who was the outreach worker in Lil'wat, said it is important that local First Nations Chiefs and councils continue with what has been started.

Elder abuse has become particularly concerning, she said, because they are receiving compensation from the government for their residential school experiences and that can result in family members or friends taking advantage.

The Building Bridges Safety and Security Agreement, however, was only signed by two Chiefs from the Lil'wat and Squamish.

Chief Lucinda Phillips with the Lil'wat said she attended and signed on her own behalf and hopes council will support the symbolic gesture.

Phillips said she is supported of the initiative, and only learned about the work six months ago from Pierre. She said she hopes the remaining four First Nations support the agreement so all six can get together and work on how to support the initiative together.

"This is definitely a need throughout all First Nations communities in the Sea to Sky corridor," she said.

Outreach workers like Pierre provided a variety of programming specific to each community and one-to-one support and crisis work for those in need including use of safe houses, or transition housing programs.

At the same time with federal funding, the Women's Centre was undergoing a needs assessment on second stage housing in the region. Second stage housing is where women and children can go after they leave transition housing. A provincial study found that 27 per cent of women making the transition ended up homeless and almost 30 per cent returned to their previous home, which can be a situation where the abuser is removed, returning with the violent situation resolved, or more likely, returning to the abusive situation.

That study highlighted a need for affordable second stage housing in the corridor.

"However, the cost of living in the Sea to Sky corridor and the insufficient income assistance rates leave women and their children with limited, poor and inadequate housing options," states the report. "This in turn, jeopardizes women and their children's safety, by forcing women to return to the abuser and/or put themselves at

risk of further abuse from landlords, roommates/housemates and other potentially unsafe housing situations.”

Go to www.hswc.ca for more information about the Howe Sound Women’s Centre Society or to access their First Nations Elder and Women’s Safety resource guides.

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New First Nations treaty alliance expected to emerge during July meeting while AFN gathers in the Yukon

[APTN National News](#)

May 23, 2013

Jorge Barrera



A new First Nations alliance is expected to take form during a gathering in Onion Lake Cree Nation slated for the same July week when the Assembly of First Nations holds its annual general meeting in the Yukon, according to a draft agenda obtained by APTN National News.

While talk of creating a new alliance separate from the AFN has been swirling since last fall, the planned meeting in Onion Lake will solidify the split.

The Onion Lake gathering is scheduled to begin on July 15 and run until July 18 and is expected to feature an appearance by James Anaya, the UN special rapporteur on Indigenous issues and Gov. Gen. David Johnston, according to a draft agenda.

APTN National News could not immediately confirm whether Anaya or Johnston would appear at the meeting.

The AFN is holding its annual general meeting from July 16 to July 18 in Whitehorse.

The planned new alliance stems from long-running tensions between the AFN and a number of chiefs in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan over the direction of the organization and a perceived lack of focus on treaties.

The new group, tentatively named the National Treaty Alliance, is based on a pre-existing Treaty 1 to 11 organization and the draft agenda is titled "Treaties 1 to 11 National Gathering, Our Future Depends on Unity."

Tensions within the AFN burst to the surface this past January in the lead up to a meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and First Nations leaders.

Chiefs from Manitoba, Ontario, the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan boycotted the meeting. They wanted a larger gathering including Harper, Johnston and First Nations chiefs.

Onion Lake Nation Chief Wallace Fox issued an emotional plea to National Chief Shawn Atleo and First Nations chiefs to snub Harper on the eve before the Jan. 11 meeting which was held at Langevin Block while a large Idle No More protest swirled on the streets outside.

Fox and Nepinak rallied around Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence who had embarked on a protest fast to force a meeting between Harper, Johnston and First Nations chiefs.

Johnston met with First Nations leaders separately following the Jan. 11 meeting.

According to the draft agenda, discussions during the gathering are expected to focus on the creation of the National Treaty Alliance.

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Grand Chief Derek Nepinak is scheduled to give a presentation on the creation of the new alliance and present "foundational documents."

Discussions are also expected to touch on the "mission statement" for the alliance, its principles, membership and jurisdictional matters.

AFN regional chief for Saskatchewan and Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde is also expected to speak at the meeting.

Bellegarde once ran against Atleo and is expected to again vie for the AFN's top job.

First Nations Youth Walk For Clean Water

[Huffington Post](#)

May 22, 2013

Craig and Marc Kielburger

Acadia Solomon just wanted to swim with her friends. Unfortunately the signs posted last year at her favourite swimming spot were clear: it was not safe to swim in or drink the water. The problem was pollution from the paper mill upstream. So

when she heard about a group of First Nations youth walking from Winnipeg to Ottawa to speak out about the "killing" of our nation's lakes and rivers, no power in the world was going to stop her from joining them.

Acadia is just 10 years old, but already she is more aware of, and passionate about, water issues than most adults. "Water is life. If we don't have clean water, we don't have life," she says.

No less passionate are 26-year-old Ben Raven and the five other Manitoba youth, aged 13 to 18, who, faced with a water crisis of their own, believed they had no option but to undertake an epic journey of 2,100 kilometres from Winnipeg to the nation's capital to plead for action.

Raven, a member of the Jackhead First Nation, lives in Winnipeg. More than 300 other members of the Jackhead Nation inhabit reserves in Lake Winnipeg's watershed, a two-hour drive north of Winnipeg.

For decades, the world's tenth-largest freshwater lake has been deluged with run-off and sewage leaks resulting in the explosive growth of toxic blue-green algae. Parts of the lake's watershed have been diverted to feed mines and other industrial operations.

In February, an international environmental group awarded Lake Winnipeg the dubious honour of being the world's most threatened lake.

Raven says he is one of many who have lost family to illnesses resulting from water-borne bacteria.

The federal government announced \$18-million in August, 2012, to support clean-up projects, however the initiative is still in its early stages and no projects have been announced yet, according to a spokeswoman from the Lake Winnipeg Foundation. For Raven, enough was enough. In February, he led 50 youth on a 250-kilometre march from the Jackhead reserve to the steps of Manitoba's legislature. However he wanted their message to be heard by the country's leaders, too. So on March 28, Raven and five others set out on a six-week journey to Parliament Hill.

They chose to walk to bring awareness to the communities they passed. "You're not going to do that driving a vehicle. You've got to carry the message," Raven explains. Acadia, a member of the Sagamok First Nation in Massey, Ont., near Sudbury, was waiting for the walkers as they approached. She pleaded with her parents to let her walk with them. Her parents suggested that they drive her and she get out and walk occasionally. But Acadia was adamant -- she wanted to walk the whole way. They relented and Acadia walked 600 kilometres on foot, her nervous parents driving alongside.

Along the way, other people from the communities they passed would join in and walk for short stretches.

Acadia said one of the most unfortunately memorable moments of the journey was passing a roadside stream clogged with garbage, the water a dirty, oozing orange. It reminded her of what they were walking for.

For weeks they had endured freezing temperatures, rain, hail, and even racist taunts and middle finger salutes. On Monday, May 13, they took the final steps up

Parliament Hill. But standing before the Parliament Buildings they were welcomed with only silence. There were no crowds waiting, and of Canadian leaders only one Member of Parliament -- Niki Ashton, the NDP MP for Churchill -- turned out to hear their message.

A day later, Raven and Acadia took a break from breakfast to speak with one of our team. At an adjoining table, two other walkers -- a pair of teenage girls, one sporting a red Idle No More t-shirt -- sat hunched over their food, their heads bowed with exhaustion.

"Youth are the future, but we have no future without water," explains Raven, his slender six-foot frame dwarfing the petite Acadia, who sits beside him in a downtown Ottawa hotel restaurant.

Although their words fell on deaf ears in Ottawa, Raven and the other walkers will continue to raise awareness about clean water. Raven is going on to a youth conference in Toronto, where he intends to raise these issues. Acadia plans to use the travel diary she kept to educate her classmates and community.

We wonder, though, why they have to do this at all? Acadia should be spending these warm spring weekends swimming with friends, not convincing adults to clean up her water.

Children shouldn't have to stop being children to teach us a lesson about our responsibilities to the world.

Craig and Marc Kielburger are co-founders of international charity and educational partner, Free The Children. Its youth empowerment event, We Day, is in 11 cities across North America this year, inspiring more than 160,000 attendees from over 4,000 schools. For more information, visit www.weday.com.